

Lost or destroyed works

1988-1998

Chris Byrne

**In order to create it is
necessary to destroy**

Herbert Read, Poetry and Anarchism, 1938

**If you don't document it
it didn't happen**

This statement is usually ascribed an origin in medicine or law, but equally it applies to the arts. In a local (to the artist) arts education context it has sometimes been attributed to David Harding - a motto repeated to students on the Environmental Art course at Glasgow School of Art.

A number of works that I made in the 1980s and 1990s have been lost or destroyed, and photographic documentation no longer exists, as it was also lost or destroyed. One or two works may have some record of being exhibited filed away in gallery archives, but even that is uncertain as my own copies of documents, catalogues and other ephemera, have been lost or destroyed.

All that is left is my recollection of these works, maybe some ideas or concept drawings in sketchbooks somewhere (if I still have them). Perhaps also a fleeting image in the mind of a collaborator, or someone who witnessed the exhibitions.

So this is a record of memories, more or less. Thirty or more years on from the creation of some of the works, memory has faded in parts. I can vividly remember making them, the processes involved and the visual details of each one. Some information is not recalled clearly, such as the full details of certain titles, exact dimensions or durations. There are no records left to refer to, so some entries remain partially incomplete. I have related a summary of the eventual fates of the works and documentation, including why they were lost or destroyed - mostly not very happy occasions.

Personal circumstances played a large part in the loss or destruction of these works. I relied upon self archiving of my practice for much of the period in question. I had no permanent stable residence as a young adult during the 1980s and 1990s. The typical economic precarity of an artist with limited means, led to moving home several times per year, from one rented room or flat to another, for nearly a decade.

In cataloguing these lost artworks I do not stake any claim to wider artistic significance. They all had some social or exhibition context, and therefore a life as artworks. The significance of these works for the artist is a more pertinent factor here. The loss of much (if not all) of ten years' worth of creative endeavour is primarily felt personally. Hence this attempt at documentation through remembering.

List of artworks made by Chris Byrne between 1988 and 1998, all lost or destroyed

1 - *Progression of simulacra*, 1988

3D computer graphics and 2D digital collage, a series of six images output to 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slides . Dimensions variable.

2 - *Pleasure of text*, 1988

In collaboration with Sean Keeble.

Experimental narrative recorded on colour PAL video tape.

Duration 12 mins approx.

3 - *Kaleidoscope*, 1988-89

In collaboration with June Frickleton.

Series of short experimental narratives recorded on colour PAL video tape. (Incomplete). Duration 7 mins approx.

4 - *The Revolution Of Everyday Life*, 1988

Wall relief assemblage, wood, cardboard, paper, emulsion paint.

5' x 4' x 2' approx.

4a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

5 - (*Worldwide Transmission*) - exact title partially missing/forgotten, 1988

Wall relief assemblage, wood, plaster, cardboard, paper, emulsion and poster paint. 5' x 6' x 2' approx.

5a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

6 - (*Synaesthesia*) - exact title partially missing/forgotten, 1988-89

Cast epoxy resin and fibreglass portrait head, mounted on record player turntable, acrylic paint. 2' x 2' x 2' approx.

6a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

7 - (*Tay Vortex*) - exact title partially missing/forgotten, 1988-89

Wall relief - cast epoxy resin and fibreglass, wood, acrylic paint.

8' x 4' x 2' approx.

7a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

8 - (*Lost title*) - subtitle *Belfast 1974, 1988-89*

Wall relief - cast epoxy resin and fibreglass, wood, fluorescent lights, acrylic paint, cutthroat razor, coloured lightbulb. 5' x 2' x 2' approx.

8a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

9 - (*Lost title*) - subtitle *Beirut 1982, 1988-89*

Wall relief - cast epoxy resin and fibreglass, wood, fluorescent lights, acrylic paint, teddy bear shaped piggy bank. 5' x 2' x 2' approx.

9a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

10 - *Falling man (Black Monday)*, 1989

Pencil and charcoal on paper, framed under perspex. 4' x 5' approx.

10a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

11 - (*Lost title*), 1989

Diorama model of Roman amphitheatre built inside a hand wash basin. Porcelain basin, taps and pedestal, epoxy resin, card and acrylic paint. 3' x 2' x 2' approx.

11a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

12 - *N.E.W.S. (North East West South)*, 1989

Diorama models of landscapes and buildings built inside cooking utensils. Pots, pans, colander, wood, epoxy resin, card and acrylic paint. 3' x 3' x 2' approx.

12a - 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slide documentation of above work.

13 - 12 x 3 minute reels of original Super 8mm film footage from *Sensoria*, filmed on location in Palermo, Sicily, 1993

13a - Black and white and colour photographic documentation of the above film shoot, and negatives.

14 - *Shock Corridor*, 1998

Gallery installation at Glasgow Independent Studio. Video tape wrapped around wooden frame, steel wire. Video monitor, VCR, colour PAL video cassette with sound, 20 minutes approx. 10' x 6' x 6' approx.

14a - Black and white photographic documentation of the above installation, and negatives.

15 - *Speaking In Tongues*, 1998

Slide projection installation at Glasgow Independent Studio. Kodak slide carousel, 35mm Kodak Ektachrome slides shot at Festival Square, Edinburgh, Computer graphics output to acetate mounted in 35mm slide frames. Dimensions variable.

Fate of the works

Works 2, 3, 12

These works were stored by the artist and moved with him to various rented accommodation until 1992. These works, including original video footage, drawings and designs, were seized along with some personal possessions, by a landlord in lieu of unpaid rent, while the artist was in the process of being evicted from a room in a shared flat. The rent went unpaid and the possessions and works were never recovered. Lost, presumed destroyed, in 1992.

Works 4, 5, 7

Destroyed by the artist due to lack of storage space, 1989.

Work 6

This work was retained by the artist and displayed in his living quarters until 1994. A move to London meant the work was given to a musician friend of the artist as a gift. Sadly the friend died far too young in 1999. The friend's relatives disposed of the deceased's possessions. Presumed destroyed in 1999.

Works 8, 9

Retained by the artist until a house move to Edinburgh. Destroyed by the artist due to lack of storage space, 1990.

Work 10

This work was retained by the artist and displayed in his living quarters until 2000. The fate of this work is not clearly recalled, most likely accidentally lost or damaged beyond repair during a house move in 2000.

Work 11

During exhibition in 1989, this work was pulled off the wall by a young child who recognised the origins of the artwork in domestic objects. The work was damaged and subsequently repaired by the artist. Destroyed by the artist due to lack of storage space, 1990.

Works 1, 13, 15

These works remained in the artist's possession as part of a personal archive until 2004. Unfortunately they suffered the same fate as all the documentation, see below. Lost, presumed destroyed, sometime between 2004 and 2007.

Work 14

Colour PAL video cassette with sound survives, everything else destroyed or disposed of following de-installation from the gallery.

Fate of the documentation

Documentation of all works remained in the artist's possession as part of a personal archive until 2004. In 2003, the archive was moved temporarily to the office of an arts organisation the artist had founded in 1999. In 2004, the artist was denied access to this personal archive due to an employment dispute with the board of the organisation. The artist subsequently left the organisation, but the dispute continued through legal channels for a further 18 months. The personal archive, including documentation, catalogues, publicity and ephemera was never recovered. Lost, presumed destroyed, sometime between 2004 and 2007.

